

# REINVIGORATING THE LIBRARY TOUR: ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

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## INTRODUCTION

“Would anyone like to guess what this is? What does it show you? What does it look like? Well, I’m sure you’ll be interested to learn that this is a replica of one pound of human body fat and it is just one of the many curious items that we have in the Curriculum Materials section of this library, because we’re here to collect weird and interesting things that will help you to create fun, engaging, and informative lesson plans. In addition to the weird Curriculum Materials, you’ll see in the front section our collections of children’s books, fiction and nonfiction, from preschool through high school reading levels. We also have books for helping you to discover lesson plans, activities, and reproducible materials in this section behind me. For your tour today, you’ll be scouring these areas in search of something that fascinates you. Go ahead, pull it off the shelf, play with it. When you find something, bring it back to where you’re sitting here, and we’ll explore your choices.”

The above paragraph is an example of a typical tour of the Instructional Materials Center (IMC), a collection that exists to support student coursework in the School of Education at Miami University. In this paper, you’ll learn how we came to offer this unusual style of tour and what we’ve noticed as a result.

## THE TOUR PROBLEM

The IMC is a unique place and collection at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Set up as a large school library,

there are collections of easy books and chapter books, nonfiction for all ages, idea books for teachers, puppets, K-12 textbooks, and the aforementioned “weird stuff,” which includes globes, models, posters, board games, and anything else one could possibly imagine that might “spice up” a teacher’s lesson plan. Library staff refer to this collection as a learning lab for education – this is a place where budding teachers can come and look for ways to present required information to their students in a unique and exciting way. It’s a place for their idealism to play.

The IMC is lucky to have a fantastic space within the library, with tables for group work, a cozy seating space near some interior windows, and a space for class demonstrations. Additionally, we have a great location, just behind the very popular café in the King Library basement.

Because of both the IMC’s materials and its visibility, library staff are asked for many tours throughout the year. This, in and of itself, is not a problem. However, upon reflection it was discovered that when giving these tours, the librarian talked passionately about engaging students with these materials and the importance of student motivation, and yet there was no engagement. So, how could one motivate the students and make the tour engaging?

## SOLUTION: ACTIVE TOURS

An active tour is a tour that requires its participants to engage in some sort of activity that serves to introduce the participant to both the overall organization of the library and the material at hand. The activity varies depending on the class and should attempt to be made relevant to current or future assignments. Most importantly, active tours encourage students to wander the stacks and interact with material at or

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near its shelving location. In this activity, students become more acquainted with the library's organization, the variety of materials available, and the locations within a library.

The active tour was first tested with a group of students preparing for their practicum experience for tutoring students in reading. The instructor requested a tour that would introduce them to the various reading materials available to them. When the students came to the library for their tour, they were first seated in the IMC classroom area and given a welcome and introduction to the IMC. They were then given a brief and simplified overview of the types of materials available, with special emphasis on items that would be of use to them in their practicum, such as the language materials and easy reader books. Students were then encouraged to walk through the sections of the IMC and choose an item that they might like to use one-on-one, which they would bring back to share with the group.

As students explored the library, the librarian wandered with the students, offering instruction and feedback when necessary. Library employees then laid out materials that had been pre-selected according to the practicum's needs. When students returned to the tables, they engaged in a brief sharing session, in which they were able to share with the group what they found and how they would use it. The librarian then spoke about the items that had been laid out on the table, and students rotated through both the pre-selected items and their selected items, spending a few minutes at each table. At the end of the activity, students are encouraged to check out any item that appealed to them.

## RESULTS

After the first active tour, the IMC saw its overall circulation increase from 887 in June 2008 to 1034 in June 2009. Library employees have also noticed that the students from that practicum continued to come and wander the stacks when they needed an additional resource for their practicum.

Since the first active tour, several other instructors have requested their students also receive active tours. To date, ten active tours have been given, with activities and materials updated according to class objectives. More advanced classes are typically asked to select an item and come up with three to five different ways to use the same tool in the classroom. The "stations" rotation activity continues to be used as a method for introducing students to the variety of resources available in a certain area.

Overall, feedback from the tours is positive, with instructors finding it to be a useful way to introduce students to a lot of material in a short period of time. The only negative feedback so far has been from students who have already participated in an active tour in an earlier class, commenting that they had already seen many of the materials at hand. This will be addressed by varying lists of items on a yearly basis for classes, and by encouraging students to choose items that they haven't seen before.

## CONCLUSION

The active tours have been a fun and engaging way to introduce students to the library collections. This is an idea in its infancy, and it is hoped that other librarians and departments will be encouraged to investigate what is discoverable in all library stacks. Moving forward, the librarians giving tours of the IMC will continue to highlight interesting and useful resources by encouraging students and faculty to explore.

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